

Question 8: \$70 Million Bond

Open Space, Recreation, Bay & Watershed Protection

Can We Afford a \$70 million Open Space, Clean Water Bond?

- Investment in open space preservation is not a decision that can be deferred. Opportunities for protecting our communities' most important and most valued natural areas and open spaces are disappearing. Development pressure and land prices are expected to continue to rise for the foreseeable future. If we don't act now, many of our communities' priorities for protection will be developed into sprawling subdivisions. Those priority open spaces that remain – that aren't developed – will be much more costly to protect in future years.
- Much of the bond funding – \$33 million – will be invested in land preservation. This is one of the few state bond investments that **increases** in value over time.
- Interest rates are at record low levels. Borrowing money for investments in open space preservation and clean water projects will never be less expensive.
- \$8 million will be invested in land preservation to protect drinking water supplies. If these drinking water supplies aren't protected and become contaminated, future costs for treating our drinking water will be much higher than the cost of protecting water supplies now.
- \$10.5 million in clean water funding will be used for a revolving loan program for renovating and upgrading wastewater treatment plants. This money will not be “spent” but will be loaned for local projects and reused many times in the future throughout the state.
- State bond funds are a critical match for local government and foundation grants. Each \$1 of state bond funding for open space is matched by more than \$3 in additional funding towards open space protection. Recreation and water grants are matched \$2 to every \$1. And the \$10.5 million for wastewater loans will be leveraged with federal funds at a 3:1 ratio, providing for nearly \$30 million in improvements to wastewater treatment plants. Without state bond funds for a match, federal and private grants will be lost.
- Other Bond funding will be used for investments to:
 - Renovate and create recreation facilities
 - Reduce stormwater pollution
 - Reduce other pollution into our streams, rivers and bays
 - Restore habitat along the waters' edge

Much of this investment will also be matched by funding from other sources, so that the state bond monies are again only a portion of project funding. These programs have strong track records and are a great deal for the state and our communities.

- We can not afford to delay work on facility improvements and habitat restoration to help avert fish and shellfish kills and beach closings like those we have experienced. Protecting the health and vitality of Narragansett Bay depends on retaining natural areas, forests and other open spaces along shorelines and in watersheds as well as making key investments in wastewater treatment facilities.

- Water quality is vital to keeping the 3,000 boats in the commercial fishing fleet working and earning. This industry landed \$65 million worth of fish and shellfish in 2001 and employs 800 workers in 69 wholesale businesses and fish processing plants.
- Rhode Island's overall economy is highly dependent on clean water, open space, recreation facilities, and working farms and woodlands. Tourism alone is a \$2.5 billion industry in Rhode Island.
- Small forest and wood-based businesses contribute over \$120 million a year to Rhode Island's economy.

What Happened to Funds from the 2000 Land and Water bonds?

The 2000 bond funds are, or are about to be, fully exhausted for each of the categories covered.

Statewide Open Space Protection. In the four years since the 2000 Open Space & Recreation Bond for \$34 million was passed, open space protection grants have helped protect 87 properties and over 6,462 acres throughout the State.

Farmland Preservation. Since 1985, the Farmland Preservation program has protected 58 farms with a total of 4,312 acres, 1,100 of them since the 2000 Open Space & Recreation Bond was passed. There are 26 farms with 2,000 acres on the waiting list for the state's farmland protection program. The bond is essential to keeping productive farmland in Rhode Island, meeting the increasing demand for locally grown farm products, and maintaining this important part of Rhode Island's economic base. Agriculture contributes \$100 million to the Rhode Island economy each year.

Local Open Space Grants. In 2002, 19 proposals for DEM's Local Open Space Grants were funded with \$5.7 million. In 2004, DEM received 46 applications for Open Space Grants for the \$3.5 million in funds that remain from the 2000 Bond.

State and Local Recreation. Since 2000, state grants to local governments have helped to develop a wide array of recreation opportunities and improve many facilities throughout the state. In 2001, DEM awarded 47 Recreation Development Grants in 30 municipalities. In January 2004, DEM received 34 proposals for the \$3 million in funds that remain from the 2000 Bond for Local Recreation Development Grants Program.

Water Bonds Funds from four previous water bonds have enabled:

- Towns to build storm water treatment systems and create septic system maintenance programs.
- Construction of facilities to solve the state's combined sewer overflow (CSO) problems – stormwater and sanitary sewers that overflow during rainstorms and dump untreated sewage into our rivers and Narragansett Bay.
- Businesses to reduce their pollution discharges by aiding:
 - Marinas to install pump out stations to collect boat sewage;
 - Industries to remove pollutants from wastewater that can overwhelm municipal sewage treatment plants; and
 - Farmers to build facilities to keep manure out of nearby waters.

For all of the above reasons, passage of Question #8 the \$70 Million Bond Open Space, Recreation, Bay, & Watershed Protection is essential to maintain Rhode Island's high quality of life for future generations.